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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to render more specific the curriculum decisionmaking models of Goodlad and Myers. Perceived and desired loci and methods of making curriculum decisions in the secondary schools were determined by secondary school personnel in Ontario schools. Results indicated that teachers desired to have their ideas considered rather than to make decisions themselves. Group decisions were also highly desired. Both teachers and principals felt that department heads made too many curricular decisions on their own. A refinement of Myers' theory is proposed, particularly with reference to the role of the principal. (Author)

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Participative Decision Making in Curriculum

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It is a maxim in decision making that individuals who are affected by decisions should partake in making these decisions. The purpose of this paper is to examine practices in decision making in the field of curriculum in light of this maxim.

In a model on decision making in curriculum, Myers (1970) has applied organizational decision making theory to the field of curriculum. In his conceptual framework he identifies processes and persons conducive to making rational decisions. Processes are divided into societal, institutional and instructional levels, as suggested by Goodlad (1966) and Parsons (1959), and are applied to persons ranked according to the hierarchical structure of a school system: board of education, superintendent, principal, and teacher.

Myers assigns varying responsibilities for curriculum and instruction to each level. Boards of education articulate the values of the educational program; they establish societal aims for their district and establish decision making procedures. Superintendents and their staff at the institutional level have basically the same responsibilities as the board of education at the societal level. They vary only in their specificity, interpretation and refinement. At the instructional level, teachers make all those decisions they are empowered to make by the board of education. Myers sums up

his conceptual scheme in this way:

We have seen where the board of education has the responsibility to develop values, aims, and procedures. The institutional level has the responsibility to refine aims and procedures, and to develop criteria. These efforts are undertaken at these levels to provide the teachers with objectives, procedures, and criteria. (1970:27)

Where does the principal enter the decision making process? He makes decisions often without consulting his teachers, Myers claims. The real role of the administrator should be to act as an interpreter and enforcer of policies and as an upward communication agent. He should also be a procedural taskmaster who enforces procedures that are followed in making decisions, and a stability agent who dynamically incorporates the demands of the community and of the profession.

Myers' conceptual framework is built on established theories of formal organization, of curriculum, and of decision making. Yet empirical research in curriculum in which findings are linked to Myers' model of decision making is not excessive.

Many studies indicate that teachers desire greater autonomy, either individually or in groups, in making certain curriculum decisions. (Chase, 1952; Sharma, 1955; Simpkins and Friesen, 1969) On the other hand, the contention of some practicing administrators that teachers do not desire too much participation in decision making is supported by Alutto and Belasco (1972). They concluded that only some

teachers are decisionally deprived; others are saturated, and still others are in equilibrium and desired no change from the current rate of participation. Simon (1950) called the latter two states a subordinate's "zone of indifference". But not only does one have to consider the decisional state of the participant, but one also has to specify the mode or procedure by which participation can take place.

Design

The study reported here gave respondent teachers six procedures to choose from. The first three can be classified as one-man decisional procedures whereby decisions are made by (a) the principal, (b) the department head, and (c) the individual teacher. The next three are group-decision procedures whereby (a) a group discusses a problem and provides information but leaves the final decision to the democratic centralist, the principal or, in some cases, the department head, (b) a group makes a decision which is binding when the majority agrees, a parliamentary procedure, and (c) a group makes a decision for which consensus is required. From these six procedures respondents had to choose one for the following three task items pertaining to curriculum: (1) selecting textbooks for a subject, (2) planning the curriculum for a subject, and (3) evaluating the curriculum for a subject.

The respondents were 192 secondary school teachers from six randomly selected Ontario school boards. They were

given questionnaires with identical task items, one for their perception of which procedures were used to reach decisions in their school presently, and one for their preferences of which procedures should ideally be used.

Results

The frequencies of the teacher responses are given in Table I.

Table I

Frequencies of Teacher Responses in Choosing a Decision Making Procedure for Three Task Items (N=192)

Procedure	Task Items					
	Perceived 1	2	3	Desired 1	2	3
Principal	2	-	3	1	1	1
Department Head	50	36	36	23	22	15
Teacher	45	50	48	57	34	42
Democratic Centralist	48	51	49	50	49	43
Parliamentarian	27	30	38	37	51	46
Consensus	20	25	18	24	35	45

Task 1: Selecting textbooks for a subject.

Task 2: Planning the curriculum for a subject.

Task 3: Evaluating the curriculum for a subject.

The most obvious result is the low level of perceived and desired involvement of the principal as sole decision maker. This finding conforms to Myers' conception of the principal as procedural taskmaster. The next noticeable item is the imbalance between the perceived and desired role of the department head. Teachers would prefer a sharply decreased

role of the department head as single decision maker for all three task items. To further emphasize this point it should be pointed out that the teacher sample included twenty-four department heads, many of whom checked off the second procedure, Department Head, for all three task items, both for the perceived and for the desired procedure.

Teachers desired less involvement as single decision makers in planning and evaluating the curriculum for a subject (tasks 2 and 3). One wonders why teachers voted in this way; a variety of explanations are possible. One interpretation is, and this is borne out by the findings, that teachers desire more group participation, possibly because they feel a lack of expertise and knowledge, or merely to test their ideas and views. Another possible reason is the need to coordinate and integrate various curricula with the school. One would have expected teachers to prefer more decisional power over this crucial area, particularly since this planning is done for a subject, their subject. Instead, teachers desire a decrease in personal decision power and prefer participative decision making, either with the principal as democratic centralist or through parliamentary procedures. Could this be interpreted as an admission or acknowledgement of curricular expertise and knowledge on the part of the principal, or does it simply mean that teachers do not want to accept the responsibility for curriculum decisions or even that they lack the time to make these decisions.

The data suggest that teachers prefer to evaluate the curriculum for a subject through the parliamentary and consensus procedure. They seem hesitant to evaluate the curriculum themselves, or to leave it up to the department head or principal to make the final decision. Possibly, the word "evaluation" is taken more as a personal evaluation, rather than as an evaluation of the curriculum. Consequently, relative security and avoidance of dyadic conflict is sought through group procedures.

In selecting textbooks, teachers strongly prefer a shift from department heads to themselves as individual decision makers, or to the parliamentary method, whereby they and their department heads each have a vote. Several teachers do not resent the influence principals have on the textbook issue; they seem to want simply some kind of input, a channel of communication, to have their views heard and taken into consideration.

Discussion

These findings can be related to Myers' (1970) model of decision making in curriculum. Starting with the administrator, the role of the principal as procedural task master seems to embrace the parliamentary and consensus arrangement for making decisions, but not the democratic centralist procedure. Myers states that

As a procedural task master, he insists that persons making a decision use what are considered to be appropriate procedures. This differs from the administrator making a decision arbitrarily, making a decision after consulting the teachers as a data source, or per-

mitting the teachers to make a decision unhampered by any type of regulatory or controlling device. (1970:34)

Myers claims that principals should act as resource persons themselves and should insist that adequate procedures are followed. Ultimately, "the principal is obligated to accept the teacher's decision regardless of whether he agrees with it." (1970:34) His role as monitor of group processes he could possibly fulfill by being a group member and a communication agent in the parliamentary and consensus type of decision making arrangement. As such he could also interpret policies set at the institutional level and in turn "provide the higher level of organization with information concerning how policies are accepted at a lower level." (1970:43) This view is consistent with the work of Likert (1967) and Wiles (1967:201-202).

The data for teachers seem to conform, though only partly, to Myers' model. If we interpret "planning and evaluating the curriculum for a subject" to mean determining objectives and deciding on organizing centres to accomplish and to evaluate these objectives--and Myers seems to justify such an interpretation--then teachers should make all decisions. Conceivably, the selection of textbooks can be included here. The findings show that teachers generally perceive and desire to make such decisions either individually or through group procedures. But the results also indicate that teachers want to retain the principal as democratic centralist. They seem satisfied to act as data- and information sources and

prefer to have the final decision made by the principal.

Clearly, these and previous findings are sparse, inconclusive and inadequate as a basis for definite conclusions and recommendations. The discipline "curriculum", and decision making is but one aspect of it, should be analyzed and dissected into its basic, essential, vital component parts for researchers to focus on individually, from different perspectives and angles. Subsequently, interrelationships and interactions of two or more component parts should be investigated until a clear structure of the discipline emerges. This structure can then be the basis for an operational framework of curriculum, useful to theory builders, researchers, and clients by providing guidance and direction. As it is now, curriculum is a fluid, undefined, evanescent discipline, neither well understood nor favourably regarded by school personnel. Conflicting and contradictory research findings come therefore as no surprise.

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